

Is political orientation transmitted genetically?

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As reported in this week's issue of New Scientist magazine, research by Rice University professor of political science John Alford indicates that what is on one's mind about politics may be influenced by how people are wired genetically.

Alford, who has researched this topic for a number of years, and his team analyzed data from political opinions of more than 12,000 twins in the United States and supplemented it with findings from twins in Australia. Alford found that identical twins were more likely to agree on political issues than were fraternal twins. On the issue of property taxes, for example, an astounding four-fifths of identical twins shared the same opinion, while only two-thirds of fraternal twins agreed.

"What we found was that it probably is going to take more than a persuasive television ad to change someone's mind on a certain political position or attitude," said Alford. "Individual genes for behaviors do not exist and no one denies that humans have the capacity to act against genetic predispositions. But predictably dissimilar correlations of social and political attitudes among people with greater and lesser shared genotypes suggest that behaviors are often shaped by forces of which the person themselves are not consciously aware."

Alford believes that political scientists are too quick to dismiss genetics; rather, he believes genetics should be studied and taught along with social-environment influences.

"It has been proven that genetics plays a role in a myriad of different human interaction and makeup," said Alford. "Why should we exclude political beliefs and attitudes?"

Source: Rice University

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